



Strategy: Use a Housing First Approach in Response and Recovery

Housing First is a model of housing assistance that prioritizes rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing without service participation requirements, preconditions, or barriers to entry, such as sobriety or income requirements. Supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability—not to address predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry. This approach assumes that supportive services are more effective in addressing the needs of an individual or family when the daily stress of being homeless is taken out of the equation. Key components of this model include a simple application process, a harm reduction approach, and no unnecessary conditions of tenancy beyond those required by the lease or by regulation. Although generally thought of as an approach specific to permanent housing, [HUD](#) and the [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) have strongly encouraged emergency shelters and transitional housing programs to adopt this approach by providing low-barrier access and assistance.

In a post-disaster environment, implementation of a community-wide Housing First orientation can reduce barriers for entry into shelters or housing for people experiencing homelessness and allow the community to move people into housing more quickly. The core components of Housing First include:

- **Few to no programmatic prerequisites to permanent housing entry.** People experiencing homelessness are offered assistance with no programmatic preconditions such as demonstration of sobriety, completion of alcohol or drug treatment, or compliance with a treatment regimen. For example, people are not required to enter a transitional housing program to enter permanent housing.
- **Low barrier admission policies.** Admissions policies are designed to screen-in rather than screen-out applicants with the greatest barriers to housing, such as no or very low income, poor rental history, past evictions, or criminal histories. Housing programs may have tenant selection policies that prioritize people who have experienced homelessness the longest or have the highest service needs demonstrated by vulnerability assessments or the high use of crisis services.
- **Rapid and streamlined entry.** Many people experiencing homelessness may experience anxiety and uncertainty during a lengthy housing application and approval process. In order to ameliorate this, emergency shelter or housing programs following a Housing First approach make efforts to help people experiencing homelessness access assistance as quickly as possible, streamlining application and approval processes, and reducing wait times.



- **Supportive services are voluntary, but can and should be used persistently to engage participants.** Supportive services are proactively offered to help tenants achieve and maintain housing stability, but participants are not required to participate in services as a condition of tenancy. Techniques such as harm reduction and motivational interviewing may be useful. Harm reduction techniques can confront and mitigate the harms of drug and alcohol use through non-judgmental communication while motivational interviewing may be useful in helping households acquire and utilize new skills and information.
- **Participants have full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections.** The ultimate goal of the Housing First approach is to move people out of unsheltered locations as quickly as possible while helping them ultimately achieve long-term housing stability in permanent housing. Landlords and providers in Housing First models abide by their legally defined roles and obligations. For instance, landlords and providers do not enter tenants' apartments without tenants' knowledge and permission except under legally-defined emergency circumstances.
- **Practices and policies to prevent termination and evictions.** Housing First programs should incorporate practices and policies that prevent termination or eviction of participants. For instance, program policies consistent with a Housing First approach do not consider alcohol or drug use in and of itself to be programmatic violations, unless such use results in disturbances to neighbors, other residents, or associated with illegal activity (e.g., selling illegal substances). Housing First models may also have policies that give tenants some flexibility and recourse in the rent payment, which in many subsidized housing programs is 30% of the participant's income. For example, to avoid eviction proceedings due to missed rent payments, programs may allow tenants to enter into payment installment plans for rent arrearages, or offer money management assistance to tenants.
- **Applicable in a variety of program models.** The Housing First approach can be implemented in different types of settings, including: scattered-site models in private market apartments, with rental assistance and access to mobile and site-based supportive services; single-site models with congregate living areas or individual units and tenants have access to voluntary on-site services; and set-asides, where supportive services are offered to participants in designated units within affordable housing developments.